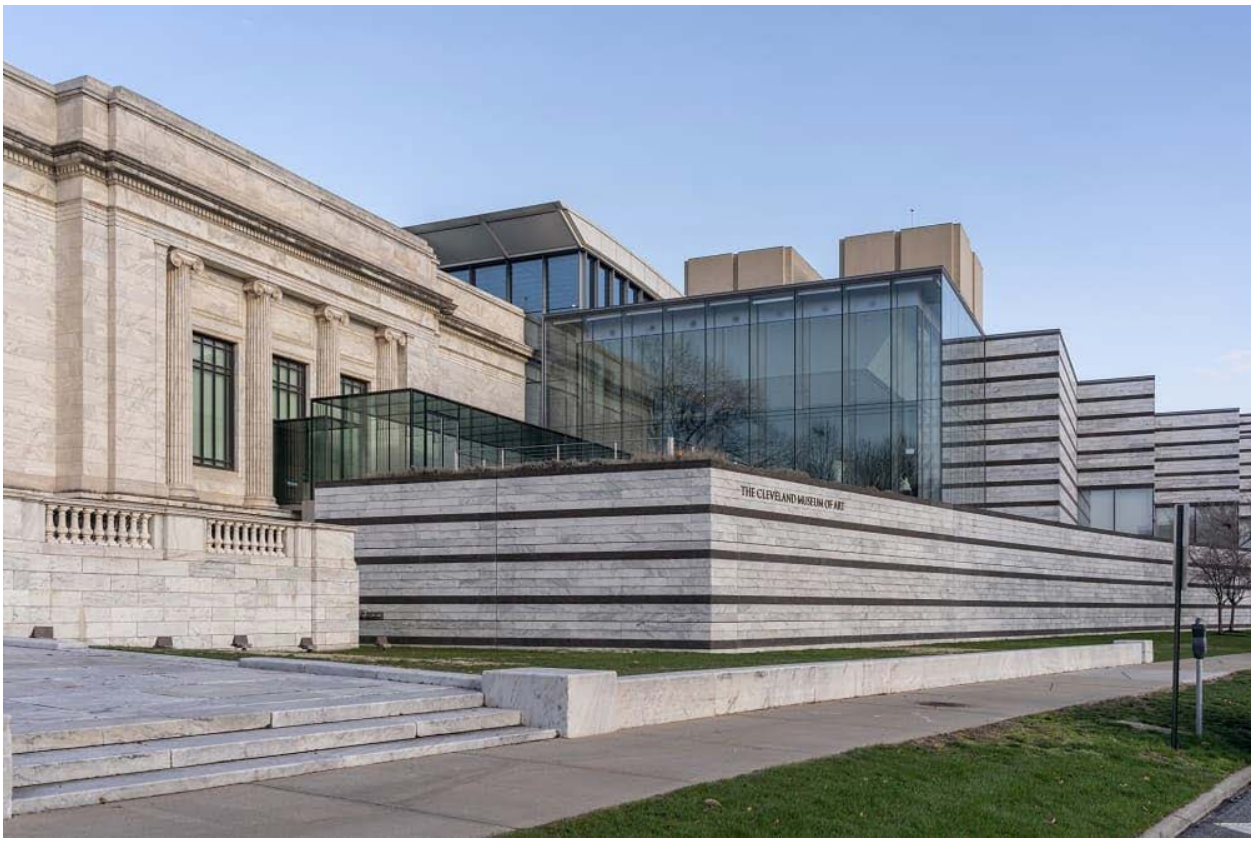
Groundbreaking Exhibition Explores the Lives of Working-Class Laundresses in 19th-Century Paris as Interpreted by Impressionist Edgar Degas

Monday October 2, 2023



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Exhibition features representations of Parisian laundresses by Degas and his contemporaries, from Daumier to Picasso—including Morisot, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard, and more—united for the first time, only in Cleveland

PRESS KIT

CLEVELAND (October 2, 2023)—The Cleveland Museum of Art announces the opening of a new exhibition, ***Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism***, on view from October 8, 2023, through January 14, 2024, in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Gallery. The first exhibition to explore Impressionist artist Edgar Degas's representations of Parisian laundresses, the groundbreaking show includes the largest selection of these works seen together to date, only in Cleveland. The artworks from this

series—revolutionary in their emphasis on women's work, the strenuousness of such labor, and social class—were featured in Degas's most significant exhibitions, where they were praised by critics as epitomizing modernity. The nearly 100 works exhibited from over 30 European and American collections reveal that depictions of laundresses by the artist and his contemporaries featured some of the most striking formal innovations of the time.

"Degas carried out some of the most striking experimentation of his long career throughout his laundress series," said Britany Salsbury, curator of prints and drawings. "The subject fascinated him beginning as a young man in the 1850s and continuing until his final decade of work as an artist. The images that he created of these women are fascinating for their emphasis on labor itself rather than the stereotypes that persisted about them throughout popular culture. The women who undertook work ironing and washing often did so because they lacked other options, and they endured tremendously difficult working conditions."

A visible presence in the city, ironing in shops open to the street or carrying heavy baskets of clothing, laundresses undertook some of the most difficult and poorly paid labor at the time, leading some in the industry to supplement their income through sex work. The depictions of these women featured in ***Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*** provide a surprising contrast to more familiar Impressionist representations of upper-middle-class leisure.

Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism contextualizes Degas's laundress series with paintings, drawings, and prints of the same subject by the artist's contemporaries—including Gustave Caillebotte, Berthe Morisot, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Édouard Vuillard—as well as painters that Degas influenced and was influenced by, from Honoré Daumier to Pablo Picasso. It also presents ephemera, such as posters, photographs, and books, that reveals the widespread interest that Parisians of all social classes had in the topic of laundresses during the late 1800s.

"The extraordinary works assembled for this exhibition reveal a new and exciting aspect of an otherwise well-known art historical movement," said William Griswold, director and president of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "The Cleveland Museum of Art's exceptional holdings of 19th-century French art situate us to present such an inventive exhibition, and we look forward to sharing works of impressive quality—from Degas's private sketchbooks to some of his most celebrated canvases alongside those by his colleagues—that have never before been seen together."

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication featuring thematic essays by scholars of art history, French studies, literature, and history. The 240-page catalogue is the first publication to examine and document Degas's portrayals of Parisian laundresses.

Principal support is provided by Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP. Major support is provided by the John P. Murphy Foundation. Additional support is provided by Christie's, the French American Museum Exchange (FRAME), Carl M. Jenks, Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. Porter Jr., and the Simon Family Foundation, a supporting foundation of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

All exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum of Art are underwritten by the CMA Fund for Exhibitions. Principal annual support is provided by Michael Frank and the late Pat Snyder, the John and Jeanette Walton Exhibition Fund, and the late Roy L. Williams. Generous annual support is provided by an anonymous supporter, the late Dick Blum and Harriet Warm, Gary and Katy Brahler, Cynthia and Dale Brogan, Dr. Ben and Julia Brouhard, Brenda and Marshall Brown, Richard and Dian Disantis, the Jeffery Wallace Ellis Trust in memory of Lloyd H. Ellis Jr., Leigh and Andy Fabens, the Frankino-Dodero Family Fund for Exhibitions Endowment, Janice Hammond and Edward Hemmelgarn, Carl T. Jagatich, Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, William S. and Margaret F. Lipscomb, Bill and Joyce Litzler, Lu Anne and the late Carl Morrison, Jeffrey Mostade and Eric Nilson and Varun Shetty, Tim O'Brien and Breck Platner, William J. and Katherine T. O'Neill, Michael and Cindy Resch, Betty T. and David M. Schneider, the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation, Margaret and Loyal Wilson, the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Claudia Woods and David Osage.

Member Preview Days
Members see it FIRST and for FREE!

Members can view ***Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*** first on Member Preview Days, Friday, October 6, 2:00–9:00 p.m., and Saturday, October 7, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Join today and reserve free tickets.

Ticket Pricing
Adults $15; seniors, students, and children ages 6–17 $12; children 5 and under and CMA members free.
The CMA recommends reserving tickets through its online platform by visiting the exhibition's web page. Tickets can also be reserved by phone at 216-421-7350 or on-site at one of the ticket desks.

Special Ticket Pricing
A discounted combination ticket for ***China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta*** and ***Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*** is available for $25 through January 7, 2024.

Complementary Programming

Virtual Symposium: Picturing Women at Work in the 19th Century

Thursday, November 16, 1:30–4:45 p.m.; Friday, November 17, 1:30–5:00 p.m.

FREE; registration required

In conjunction with two upcoming exhibitions that explore images of women's labor during the 19th century—*Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism* (Cleveland Museum of Art, October 8, 2023–January 14, 2024) and Mary Cassatt and Work (Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 18–September 8, 2024)—scholars from around the globe present on an international range of topics related to the visual culture of working women.

Organized by Britany Salsbury, Cleveland Museum of Art; Laurel Garber, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Nicole Georgopulos, University of British Columbia; and Jillian Kruse, Case Western Reserve University

Thursday, November 16

1:30–2:00 p.m. Welcome / Opening Remarks

2:00–3:15 p.m.Panel 1: Visualizing Invisible Labor

The Lumière Sisters: Rethinking Female Labor in the 19th Century through Photography and Early Film
Kristina Köhler, University of Cologne

Women Leaving the Shoe Factory: Frances Benjamin Johnston's Photographs of Shoemakers
Isabelle Lynch, University of Pennsylvania

Enmeshed: Lace and Women's Labor in 19th-Century Photographs
Beth Saunders, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Troubled Domesticities
Elizabeth Carmel Hamilton, Fort Valley State University

3:15–3:30 p.m.Break

3:30–4:45 p.m.Panel 2: Depicting Laundry and the Textile Trade
The Seamstress: A Working Woman for the Middle Classes
Alice J. Walkiewicz, Pratt Institute

Imperlaperle e merlettaie: Women Workers at the Point of the Needle in Late 19th-Century Venice
Anna Dumont, Northwestern University

Women at Work: Laundresses and Potable Water in the Entorno of 19th-Century Mexico City
Stacie G. Widdifield, University of Arizona

The Air That They Breathed: Thinking Ecocritically about Degas's Laundresses
Marni Reva Kessler, University of Kansas

Friday, November 17

1:30–2:45 p.m.Panel 3: Labor and the Colonial Gaze

Imperialist Imagery of Chinese Weaving Women in Great Britain: Thomas Allom and the Reworking of the Pictures of Weaving Genre
Roslyn Lee Hammers, University of Hong Kong

Wringing Out the "Laundry Problem" in East Asian Modern Art
Stephanie Seung Eun Lee, Northwestern University

Black Women Workers and the Art of US Occupation in Haiti, 1915–1934
Shelby M. Sinclair, Dartmouth College

Portraying Working Women in the Visual Culture of 19th-Century India
Divya Gauri, Jawaharlal Nehru University

2:45–3:45 p.m.Panel 4: Representing Marketing and Selling

Female Street Vendors, Manhattan to Montevideo: Local Market / Global Trade
Katherine Manthorne, The Graduate Center, CUNY

Chic Parisienne: The Department Store Saleswoman and Class in 19th-Century Paris
Justine De Young, Fashion Institute of Technology (SUNY)

Seeing and Sewing: The Family Business
Francesca Berry, University of Birmingham

3:45–5:00 p.m. Keynote Address and Final Discussion

Demystifying the Immodest Modiste in 19th-Century Paris
Susan Hiner
Professor of French and Francophone Studies
Director of Research Development on the John Guy Vassar Chair
Vassar College

ARTIST IN THE ATRIUM
Iron-On Art
Saturday, November 18, 11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
FREE

Speaker: Julie Schabel, Wave Space Studio

Every third Saturday of each month, stop by the Ames Family Atrium between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to get a firsthand look at the art-making process. Each session provides the opportunity to engage and interact with a different Northeast Ohio maker during pop-up demonstrations and activities. See their work unfold and learn how artists create. Explore a related selection of authentic objects from the CMA's education art collection in a pop-up Art Up Close session. See, think, and wonder.

At this month's session, explore Edgar Degas's images of women at work by creating iron-on prints. Make your own printed handkerchief using designs by artist Julie Schabel of Wave Space Studio, add to a community-decorated tablecloth, and understand the world of working people in the 19th century with objects from the museum's education art collection.

Edgar Degas: The Artist's Process and the Question of Finish
Wednesday, November 29, 6:00 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium
FREE; ticket required

Speaker: Ann Hoenigswald, Senior Conservator of Paintings Emerita, National Gallery of Art

Edgar Degas was a particularly experimental 19th-century artist. Close technical study of his paintings, graphic work, and sculptures reveals his eccentric choice of materials and unconventional manipulation of media. Degas was known to rework his pictures, often decades after initially considering them finished, and often approached his artworks as if they were works in progress. Frequently, he left clues on the surface to expose these changes, but on occasion only with technical imaging can the embedded layers be

deciphered. This lecture explores these aspects of his paintings and delves into his process, his use of materials, and the complicated issue of finish.

A conservator of paintings at the National Gallery for more than 40 years, Ann Hoenigswald focuses on the treatment and technical studies of 19th- and early 20th-century paintings, with a particular interest in artists' process, intended surfaces, and the issue of finish. Her research and publications are often in collaboration with curators and academic art historians. She is currently an invited Museum Scholar at the Getty Research Institute working on Degas.

All education programs at the Cleveland Museum of Art are underwritten by the CMA Fund for Education. Major annual support is provided by Brenda and Marshall Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Walter E. Fortney, Florence Kahane Goodman, Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, and the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation. Generous annual support is provided by an anonymous supporter, the M. E. and F. J. Callahan Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Chapman Jr., Char and Chuck Fowler, the Giant Eagle Foundation, the Lloyd D. Hunter Memorial Fund, Bill and Joyce Litzler, the Logsdon Family Fund for Education, Mandi Rickelman, Betty T. and David M. Schneider, the Sally and Larry Sears Fund for Education Endowment, Roy Smith, the Trilling Family Foundation, and the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is funded in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

Education programs are supported in part by the Ohio Arts Council, which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts.